

The Home News Tribune  
March 12, 2000

Flying the Good Flight  
Eco-Literature: Good plot and a plea for the environment

By Terry Lipshetz  
Staff Writer

A good plot always makes a book enjoyable to read. But a good book can't rely solely on the plot. With book stores dominated by an endless number of science fiction, law, military and horror novels, it is refreshing to see an author take a completely new approach to writing, while at the same time still address universal themes and current events.

John Morano, a professor at Monmouth University in West Long Branch, takes the road less traveled—eco-literature—with his first novel, “A Wing and A Prayer.”

Although originally released in 1993, only 10,000 copies were printed by Northwest Publishing Company. Since then, Little Blue Works has reprinted the book, which is now available on a much larger scale.

The story follows the life of Lupe, a Guadalupe Petrel, who believes he is the last of his kind alive. Lupe is held in captivity by the “man-flock” and must find a way to escape, not just because he desires to live free again, but he knows that he must find a way to repopulate his kind.

Throughout the book Lupe encounters a wide range of characters that help him along his journey, including Zomis (a passenger pigeon that believes he is a rat) and Gilongo (a green turtle he meets while flying over the ocean). He also encounters a lizard named Stithl, whose dialog makes him sound like a New York City cab driver.

During all this, Lupe flashes back to his youth and remembers lessons he learned from his parents and his grandmother, Pakeet, who was among the wisest of his flock.

The book tackles several themes, most obviously ecological problems created by humans. At the end of the book, Morano writes that most of the animals in his book fall into one of three categories: threatened, endangered or extinct.

For instance, Lupe's species of marine bird was last seen off the coast of Mexico in 1911, although a few species of petrels have managed to survive. Passenger pigeons, such as Zomis, have been extinct since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

John C. Sawhill, President and CEO of The Nature Conservancy, wrote the introduction to “A Wing and a Prayer” and backs Morano’s efforts toward the awareness of ecological problems surrounding animals.

Sawhill writes: “In Morano’s ‘A Wing and a Prayer,’ John Morano presents a compelling tale of species extinction as well as an indictment of our mistreatment of the environment.”

Morano, however, does not focus entirely on ecological issues. Lupe is clearly a religious bird, who turns to Pettr—much the same way some humans turn to God—to help him find strength in his journey.

Any time Lupe encounters a bird (or thinks about Pakeet) that lives a good life devoted to Pettr, he says that he or she “flies the good flight.”

Morano also examines contemporary social issues, such as gender equality. Lupe encounters Sirka, a female Petrel who has taken on roles previously reserved for male birds but handles her own duties just as well. As you read this book and form visions of the characters in your mind, you can picture this story being turned into an animated feature. With so many film studios competing with Disney to produce animated movies, it would be no surprise to see Lupe fly the good flight across the silver screen.

And that’s what makes this novel so enjoyable. Like many animated classics, this is a story the whole family can enjoy. Utilizing an entertaining cast of characters, Morano makes you want to read further to see if Lupe cannot only fly again, but start a family of his own.

Although categorized as a young-adult novel, this book soars because of its universal themes and characters, as well as the message within the pages—respect the environment and all that live within it or someday these creatures will be gone.

Morano is currently putting the finishing touches on his last novel, “Makoona,” the story of a female octopus who lives in a coral reef. If that story is as good as “A Wing and a Prayer,” Morano will be well on his way in bringing eco-literature to the mainstream.